

Vermont is in line to receive up to \$3.1 million over the next five years as part of one of the country's largest investments ever in promoting good health, the Vermont congressional delegation announced today.

Vermont will be a leader in the new national initiative that also will limit spending by avoiding costly, chronic diseases in the first place, according to U.S. Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and U.S. Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.).

The Vermont delegation had urged U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to include Vermont in the first round of grants.

Dr. Harry Chen, the Vermont health commissioner, welcomed the grant. The state will use the first year's installment of \$621,760 to help decrease disparities in health care for poor people and minorities. The department plans to focus on reducing tobacco use and promoting exercise and healthy diets.

Nationwide, Vermont was one of 61 recipients of grants to fight chronic diseases, the leading cause of death in Americans. Created by the Affordable Care Act, the health care reform law, the new grant program will address the root causes of disease that often are related to economic, social, and physical factors.

Sanders chairs a Senate panel on primary health care. "In America today millions of people are dying prematurely and are suffering from a number of diseases because of smoking and poor diets," he said. "Investing in disease prevention and healthier life styles will not only save lives and ease human suffering, it will also save health care dollars. The truth is that it is a lot less expensive to invest in disease prevention than in hospital care."

Leahy said, "Curbing chronic disease is a key path to keeping Vermonters healthier, trimming health costs and narrowing the health care gap that separates rich, middle-income and poor Americans. It's just common sense, and I am glad that Vermont will continue to lead and innovate on this and other elements of health insurance reform."

Welch said, "Vermont has led the nation in creating better health care outcomes for all citizens, regardless of their economic means. This grant will help the state further that work," he said. "Providing preventative services to those in need will reduce the rate of costly, chronic conditions among vulnerable populations and better align health care spending to encourage healthier outcomes."

In Montpelier, Commissioner Chen said, "This federal award will go a long way toward strengthening our rural communities' capacity to promote health, prevent chronic illness and reduce health disparities for all Vermonters – wherever you live, work, play or get your health care."